

Purifying the Nation: British Neo-Fascist Ideas on Representations of Culture

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Introduction

Although fascism and neo-fascism have emphasised ‘action’ in politics, we should not underestimate the extent to which far right ideologues have sought to engage in the intellectual and cultural arena. This paper investigates the ideas, attitudes and discourse of the post-1945 British far right concerning representations of culture.

I will argue that the ideological texts of the far right show a recurrent concern with the need for the so-called ‘purification’ of national culture. In essence, there is a belief expounded by the extreme right that ‘liberal’ cultural forms have resulted in national decadence, in turn showing the extent to which the nation itself is in serious decline. Consequently, there has been a consistent call in far right texts and statements for the ‘regeneration’ of the nation, together with the expression of a conviction that national culture requires ‘cleansing’ as part of this ambitious project.

The far right’s key ideologues in Britain have regularly expressed views on what constitutes ‘true’, legitimate and authentically ‘British’ cultural representations, and they have often pointed to what is (in their estimation) ‘decadent’ versus ‘healthy’ cultural and national identities.

It is intended in this paper to illustrate the far right’s prescription for political and cultural renewal through a brief exploration of the intellectual texts of three neo-fascist movements operating after 1945: the Union Movement (UM), formed in 1948, the National Front (NF), formed in 1967, and the British National Party (BNP),

formed in 1982. The aim is *not* to attempt an in-depth analysis of all three movements but, rather, to provide a general overview of the common ideas expressed.

The importance of cultural representations in post-1945 far right ideology: Some general points

The British far right in the post-war period was determined to link cultural activity with national and racial identity. Its definition of what constituted 'true' or 'eternal' culture was designed to furnish actual and potential supporters with a grasp of the essence of 'Britishness'. In the eyes of the far right, an understanding of national, and, indeed, 'Western', identity was intimately bound up with delineating which cultural representations were legitimate - and which were not.

National identity could only be comprehended through an appreciation of the supposedly distinctive nature of British and white Western cultural creativity: i.e. via the works of 'high' art, literature, poetry, music and architecture that were rooted in 'classical', non-Modernist forms. Pre-twentieth century cultural representations were often pointed to as models. These had once made Britain 'great', given her an Empire, and Europe a 'superior' civilisation.

This claim was particularly evident in the ideology of the BNP, the largest far right party in Britain in recent years. BNP ideologues offered, in their estimation, an authentic version of culture and history, cleansed of those forces which had allegedly engulfed the British people in a 'swamp' of decline and loss of national identity.

Avant-guard and Modernist cultural forms were demonized as 'decadent', corrupting and ugly. They were the results of the 'anarchy' created by political liberalism.

In particular, from 1981 to 1999, under John Tyndall's leadership, the BNP's cultural pessimism concerning the future of the British nation and the West, partly derived from the writings of Oswald Spengler and other 'Conservative Revolutionaries',

provided an ideological continuity with both UM and NF writers and - I would argue - from the interwar period, also the BUF.

This pessimism concerning the cultural aspects of liberal society was combined with an *optimism* about the potential of decisive political action: a modern non-liberal political movement could save the nation, it was claimed. History had not ended and, as one BNP writer put it in Spearhead in 1996, decline was 'not an inevitable process'. Indeed, the 'Spenglerian' prognosis on the decline of civilizations proved a frequent source of ambivalent fascination for ideologues in all the three movements under discussion in this paper. In line with inter-war fascist critiques of Spenglerian pessimism, British neo-fascists were convinced that the symptoms of national illness could be cured and decline *reversed*. They resolved to purify or cleanse 'decadent' cultural representations. This was in order to not only *halt* decline but help bring about the 'rebirth' of the nation, race and 'British' identity.

Above all, in common with their inter-war predecessors, British neo-fascists envisaged a cultural crusade to bring about this supposed new dawn. This critique was combined with attempts to create and institutionalize their own cultural forms. No single neo-fascist culture emerged, but cultural activity still entailed a variety of alternatives to liberal ideas, including the promotion of an interest in 'real' history and literature, and policy statements on aesthetic issues. Study groups, book-lists in journals, articles by leading ideologues and, more recently, web-sites, were all designed to instil in members and supporters a sense of their own cultural identity, separate from mainstream liberal and decadent society.

1. Mosley and the Union Movement: The Rebirth of Culture?

The ideologues, theorists and men of letters involved in the far right in Britain during the post-1945 period very much echoed pre-war ideas concerning the fascist intention

to recover and reclaim national culture from the forces of decadence and decline (an idea prominent in the pre-war BUF). They were not shy to set themselves up as arbiters of national cultural taste and to set out the processes involved in rebuilding an authentic and 'eternal' British identity. Thus, as soon as he felt safe to resume political activity after the end of hostilities in 1945, Oswald Mosley sent out strong signals to his old BUF supporters that the 'struggle' to reverse national decline would continue. The 'modernisation' of Britain by a 'modern movement', as opposed to a mere 'party', was still the primary task of politics.

Significantly, in 1945, Mosley maintained that his own ideas had not changed during internment but had been 'greatly strengthened'. He asked his assistant Jeffrey Hamm to 'spread the ideas' and began to supply suitable texts for this. These were distributed through a loose network of 'Book Clubs' during 1946. The Book Clubs held discussion meetings where literary, cultural and philosophical questions were addressed but the underlying political agenda was an attempt to permeate mainstream culture with new Mosleyite ideas on a post-fascist 'European' identity. British identity, while still important, was now to be enhanced through 'Europe', a 'Third Way' which would be neither liberal, capitalist nor communist.

In My Answer (1946), for example, Mosley argued that, as 'we turn our eyes toward the future, we may discern – rising like Phoenix from these ashes – the undying soul of England and the European man'. In his next book, The Alternative (1947), which functioned as an ideological launch pad for the new Union Movement, Mosley further claimed that he was showing how, via the 'Will to Achievement', Western civilisation and European culture could free itself from the 'Great Negation' and achieve regeneration and 'rebirth'. Surveying post-war conditions, Mosley warned that it was 'vitally important that the culture and life of Europe should continue', and this would

‘depend on the highest type of Europeans giving all, and daring all, as an order of men dedicated to the great rebirth’.

As with the BUF’s political project, cultural considerations continued to play an important part in Mosleyite post-war texts. Articles in the Mosley Newsletter warned that the maintenance of ‘three thousand years of European life and culture’ was under threat from ‘Oriental Communism’. One writer in 1947 attacked the British Left for always being ready ‘to hail Moscow as the seat of World Culture’. In his opinion, it was important to remember that ‘through the blunders of our statesmen and the hypocrisy of our intellectuals, the Tartar is now saddled across the cultural heritage of the West’.

However, a Western and, in particular, ‘European’ identity, proved controversial among UM supporters, creating tensions in UM texts and within the movement itself. Much to the dismay of some of his former comrades, a number of whom defected to more explicit ‘racial nationalist’ groups, Mosley’s post-BUF creed increasingly stressed that ‘British’ identity would now be better realised through a wider transnational framework, which involved a greater awareness of the common *culture* of Europe and its kindred peoples. Alexander Raven-Thomson, who had been the BUF’s equivalent of the Nazi ideologue Alfred Rosenberg, was particularly concerned in 1948 to reassure Mosley’s older supporters on this issue. The new emphasis on European cultural integration did not mean the replacement of ‘our imperial heritage’ or an attempt ‘to sink our identity as a great nation into any cosmopolitan international system’. He rejected opponents’ claims that Mosley’s ‘Union of Europe’ idea contradicted the UM’s British patriotism and its desire to preserve the ‘noble traditions of our race’. It was, rather, a case of the ‘Extension of Patriotism’, ‘not a repudiation of patriotism’. Employing the imagery of purging

and cleansing the nation, Thomson argued in *Union*, the UM's newspaper:

Let us above all be British, for that title has, at least until recently, been one of high honour in the affairs of the world. We have every right to preserve that honourable name, and to eliminate from the life of the nation those alien influences which have already begun to bring discredit upon us.

UM publications continued, however, to reflect uncritically Mosley's core message in The Alternative and pointed to how Britons could find a 'kindred spirit' in wider European aesthetic achievement, such as painting, music and architecture. Hamm, for example, writing on the 'Heritage of Europe', claimed that the highpoints of European cultural history were to be found in classical Greece, Imperial Rome and in the Renaissance. During the latter period, according to Hamm, the 'creative genius of the European soared to fresh heights in every realm of art – in music, poetry, sculpture, and drama'. This 'revival' of culture was 'common to all Europe' and art 'knew no frontiers'. Hamm claimed that a good example was the work of Shakespeare. The great writer was the 'very personification of England' and, furthermore, Shakespeare was held in high esteem on the Continent. Hamm asserted that, in the new Europe 'struggling to emerge' from the ruins of the old, 'national pride is merged with that of the German adoration of Goethe, or that of the Italian admiration for a Dante or a Michael Angelo'. As Europe arose, united around the 'New Idea', Hamm declared:

... we do not speak of this British poet, or that German composer, or of some Italian composer. Our proud boast is that these men were Europeans, born of the culture and civilization of two thousand years of Latin-Teuton genius, itself the product of the three thousand year old Greek spirit.

Europe was now threatened by the ‘Asian barbarism’ of Russia, which meant the possible ‘extinction’ of the ‘genius of Shakespeare and of Goethe’ and ‘the inspiring majesty of Wagner’. Hamm asked whether Europe would ‘awake in time’, remember its ‘proud heritage’ and enable Mosley to lead ‘the Defence of the West’.

The Hellenic and Elizabethan roots of both British and wider European cultural achievements were referred to and promoted in UM articles, with an assertion that contemporary society had lost these original and ‘Higher’ cultural forms.

The UM’s cultural fascism ultimately remained, however, very much in the hands of Mosley. Two key cultural themes emerged in the UM leader’s philosophy. First of all, he was determined to reclaim and promote ‘beauty’ in all aesthetic achievement. In his vision of a ‘new type’ of man ‘in the service of a higher purpose’, set out in The Alternative, Mosley said that what he meant by this was a man who was endowed by ‘the accumulated culture of three millenia of high civilisation’.

One recurrent preoccupation in Mosley’s writings on this new type of man was the desire for some kind of cultural fascist elite. This would lead the way, educate the many, and banish representations of ‘ugliness’ in society.

His reflections on the ‘Function of Beauty’ captured this well. He argued that in a ‘really civilized community’ gifted people would be wholly dedicated to the ‘development of fresh forms of the beautiful’. The task of such people would be to ‘show the world how beautiful life could be. The Artist in life would be honoured only less than the Artist of eternal beauty in music and the plastic arts’. This idea was returned to in the 1960s. Reflecting on ‘Beauty and Truth’, Mosley stated that a society which had resolved the ‘basic needs’ should be ready to reward those who had shown ‘any form of creative gift’ in literature, music, or the arts. He wanted to build not only new amenities but to also beautify cities on a scale ‘inconceivable

today'. Mosley claimed that 'the values of the classic Greeks... remain the original and continuing inspiration of Europe'.

Secondly, although he recognised a requirement to convert the mass membership of the UM to a 'higher' level of life and culture, Mosley also decided that the UM needed to target the 'gifted people'. He believed that the permeation of his ideas in a cultural struggle in society required a specialist publication designed to reach out to the highly educated. This was the rationale behind the creation of the literary journal The European, launched in March 1953.

Robert Row, a UM ideologue, said that Mosley wanted the UM newspaper Union to win over the masses but he needed The European 'to pull in the intellectuals'. This did begin to happen. The European attracted some serious writers, including Desmond Stewart, Ezra Pound, Roy Campbell, Henry Williamson, Hugo Charteris, A.J. Gregor and Richard Aldington. Edited by Diana Mosley, the journal was a curious mixture of poetry, book sections and theatre reviews, together with commentaries on politics by Oswald Mosley.

The European folded in 1959, but the remnants of the UM (now called the Action Society) attempted to create another journal of politics and 'high' culture, Lodestar, during the late 1980s. The launch issue contained a combination of articles on political issues and reflections on 'Britain's Traditional Cultural Heritage'. This heritage was allegedly expressed in old landscape and pub names, English folk songs, northern sword dances and native British plays. Subsequent issues included articles on the writings of Colin Wilson and Henry Williamson and the music of Vaughn Williams. The desire to claim cultural and intellectual legitimacy evidently remained an important part of the UM's political ambition to expunge the nation's life of decadent representations.

2. The National Front: Cleansing the Nation?

Soon after its formation in 1967, the British far right National Front also began to articulate its fears about Britain's alleged 'decline', the reasons for this, and the political prescription for 'saving' the nation and its citizens' identity. In NF eyes, the political modernisation and 'regeneration' of the country would entail a systematic cleansing at the cultural level, banishing 'ugliness' and restoring the 'beautiful', an outlook I noted earlier in the writings of Mosley. NF texts put forward a range of ideas on culture and warned of the 'un-British' cultural threat to national and general Western identity. As with the UM, the NF saw the main threat to British culture as deriving from international Communism and its 'twin', liberal capitalism. NF texts emphasised the importance of educating future leaders, echoing Mosley's stress on the need to appeal to a younger generation of activists.

While the NF claimed in 1970 to be recruiting 'ever greater numbers of promising young men and women', one difficulty was that, in NF eyes, both academic life and the main publishing houses in Britain were supposedly 'under almost total control of liberals, internationalists and leftists of every shade'; the NF therefore recognised the need to provide a guide to alternative material giving a 'nationalist and rightist point of view'. Recommended reading for young NF activists included not only books on politics and race but also titles such as The New Morality by A. Lunn and G. Lean, which was described as 'a brilliant demolition of the permissive creed', and Rhythm, Riots and Revolution by D.A. Noebel, which dealt 'with the way in which folk and pop music are exploited by communists to disrupt society'.

Cultural sections began to appear in NF publications, giving significant indications of the party's attitudes towards cultural representations. The NF was keen to forge its own non-liberal culture, educating members in a more positive 'Nationalist'

world-view. Reviews of cultural activity were sometimes cues for NF theorists to make dire predictions about the future of national culture, echoing the cultural pessimism of A.K. Chesterton, the NF's first chairman.

In 1968, for example, in an article in Spearhead that started out by attacking the stage show 'Hair' and 'other extravaganzas of sewer life', the NF's John Bean warned of 'The Assault on Western Culture'. He claimed that this was exemplified in the changes being witnessed 'not only in the theatre, but in the cinema, in television plays, in the 'best-selling' novels, in painting, sculpture and even modern architecture'. He asserted that all these changes had one common factor: 'they are an attack upon all that is beautiful and aesthetically pleasing, and an effort to substitute the cult of ugliness'.

Bean continued: 'What we are seeing is the supplanting of the western art form... by a rootless non-form, symbolising the 'one-world' outlook of its promoters'.

Warming to his theme, Bean warned that 'modern art' was preparing the way 'mentally and culturally' for a 'de-nationalised world'. Moreover, sounding decidedly Spenglerian, Bean also argued: 'If this happens mankind will pass into a spiritual night that will last for centuries – if not forever'.

Nearly two years later, Bean returned to his fascination with Spengler's cultural ideas when he reflected in Spearhead on 'Nationalism and the Meaning of History'. He warned that Spengler could 'only give us a message of defeatism' with his view that civilizations rise and disintegrate. Bean decided (as did other NF theorists) that a distinctive cultural identity involved an awareness of history: 'To become aware of our heritage and to develop an innate desire to preserve it from destruction by assimilation with alien cultures is... one result of searching for the meaning of history'.

The desire for a 'healthy' rebirth of culture was also illustrated in an article for Spearhead in 1969 on 'Sub-Culture', the title clearly aping Nazi terminology. Written by Eddy Morrison, a 19-year old described as leader of the growing Leeds branch of the NF, the article warned of the 'gradual distortion and replacement of the British way of life and of European culture', the first channel of attack being music. Morrison complained that, in a society already soaked with 'pop' music, the new 'culture-bearers' had now introduced the cult of Indian music and 'more lately, electronic music'. The young activist claimed that folk-music, poetry and literature were all under attack and concluded: 'I believe that a National Front government, on being elected to power, should encourage the rebirth of real culture, at the same time stopping the rot of subculture'.

The link between rebirth and a 'real' culture in order to defeat decline was repeated in a 'Special Issue' of Spearhead in early 1972. One article called for a 'Renaissance of Western Man'. The anonymous author warned readers of the 'deep moral and spiritual sickness' engulfing the peoples of 'Western civilization and culture, and nowhere more than in Britain'. There was a need for 'real youth' and a condition of mind that rejoiced in radiant health. The article claimed: 'Real youth is the moving spirit of every culture in its upward surge of life...', and stated that the symptoms of sickness were there for everyone to see: 'the spiritual exhaustion of the old art-creating stratum... is reflected in the familiar excrescences of modern painting, sculpture, architecture, music and poetry – excrescences which seek to reduce those things that should exhibit life's noblest experiences down to a form which expresses only a tortured intellectualism....'.

The author complained that no allowance was being made for 'the deeply mystical and spiritual processes that move men and nations, as well as all great art', especially

‘heroic’ values. This mystical crusade would be a cultural and political revolution. The article asserted that an appreciation of the ‘inner sickness’ must lead to the conclusion that Western man could only rise again to become a ‘great’ cultural force through a ‘revolutionary change in existing institutions and values’, a change which embraced ‘an utter repudiation of everything that is meant by Liberalism’. Engaging in the British far right’s recurrent fascination with Spengler, the author stated that the ultimate task was ‘to prove wrong the Spenglerian thesis that every civilization meets its moment of irreversible decline and death’.

Later in the year Spearhead carried one of the most detailed statements of NF theory on national culture, written by Richard Verrall. The article claimed that the first real manifestations of ‘culture distortion’ appeared with the invention of ‘Cubism’, the parent of ‘abstract art’. This branch of art had supposedly exhibited ‘all those perverse inclinations that characterise a society in decline’. From this moment, Verrall argued, sprang all the ‘isms’ and the ‘anti-art’ that had ‘eaten away at the foundations of Western aesthetic values, debasing all standards and eradicating the desire for truth and beauty’ which had animated the European soul. In language notably similar to the Nazi approach to degenerate art, Verrall claimed that the ‘liberal repudiation of our racial and cultural heritage’ had led to the rejection of all inherited traditions in art. Verrall went on to describe the ‘true meaning’ of art, which could be derived from ‘experience in the real world’, the ‘traditions of the West’ and in the ‘beauties of existence’.⁸⁰ In order to build a new world, Verrall argued, ‘we must recover an old spirit’ which would be found in the ‘civilisation of classical Greece’.

Providing a clear *political* reading of culture, Verrall claimed the political ideal of the Greeks was an identification of the individual ‘with the corporate life of the nation’, and that, to the Greeks, ‘a work of art was great in so far as it represented, in its most

beauteous form, the highest aspects of the national ideal’.

Verrall asserted: ‘Healthy and aspiring nationalism... has provided that unity of belief and purpose in which all great art has arisen’. This unity had been destroyed by liberalism but a ‘regenerative movement’ would restore it, ‘sweep away all the rubble of cultural decadence’, and ‘liberate creative minds, so that the true artist once more may flourish’.

During the rest of its existence in the 1970s (and arguably also into the 1980s, despite a number of serious internal splits), the NF sought to provide further cultural material in its texts, repeating the calls for the protection of ‘national’ art and culture.

Moreover, NF writers often repeated the message that the necessary cultural changes were part of a wider ‘revolution’. Drastic ‘surgery’ to cure the ‘disease’ of national crisis and decline was required.

3. The BNP: The Centrality of Race to National Culture?

Conceptions of culture and racial identity were often inextricably linked in BNP texts. From its formation in 1982, John Tyndall was the dominant BNP ideologue (until he lost the leadership in 1999). Although he borrowed numerous phrases and ideas from Mosleyite discourse, Tyndall also derived much from Arnold Leese’s racial ideas. Indeed, from early on in his career, Tyndall placed himself firmly in the ‘racial nationalist’ tradition and shared, along with other far right activists, a deep suspicion that Mosley had placed too much faith in ‘Europe’ in his desire to reclaim the past and ‘modernise’ the future. Tyndall was convinced that the project to restore European and Western identity (and, indeed, *culture*) involved first and foremost the defence of ‘Britishness’.

His journal Spearhead illustrates this well. It had been employed as a theoretical

publication for each movement he led, and continued its life under the BNP.

The publication frequently contained evidence of Tyndall's conviction that the far right in Britain was not just a political ideology and movement. It was *also* a movement for cultural change. 'Nationalism', in Tyndall's estimation, thus put forward an all-embracing 'revolutionary' creed which placed a great deal of importance on the cultured expression of political belief. Crucially, so BNP texts claimed, the task of winning the 'cultural war' in society was a necessary precursor to ultimate success at the political level, an idea which echoed Mosley's original strategy, the NF's policy, and (arguably) contemporary far right ideas in Europe. At times, the desire to banish enemies at the political level was equated with a cultural struggle to cleanse 'ugliness' and restore 'beauty' to the nation, an image also in part derived from Mosley's discourse. As Tyndall explained in Spearhead in 1981:

I want to see the great glories of European art return and to achieve their renaissance here in Britain, so that we may again see a flowering of beauty throughout our land. I see no possibility of this happening except by means of a cultural revolution, and if intolerance of artistic trash is a necessary commodity in the carrying out of such a revolution then let us accept that and get on with it.

Moreover, in The Eleventh Hour: A Call For British Rebirth (1988), which the author described as a 'political manifesto' with an 'autobiographical element', Tyndall wielded both Mosleyite oratory *and* Leeseite imagery to persuade readers that Britain was 'in a condition of long and continual decline', requiring measures that would 'reverse the process and bring about regeneration'. At one point, he stated: 'If I am asked to define our ideal in a few words, it is that of a noble race, attaining the highest possible standards of character, health, strength and beauty, living in a land cleansed

of disease, dirt, ugliness and degeneracy and in complete harmony with the natural order'. Developing this theme, he continued: 'We want a nation... surrounded by an environment of great art and culture which will provide continual nourishment for the national spirit'.

As with the NF's ideologues, Tyndall's political ideas were underpinned by a detailed *cultural* reading of history, repeated by other BNP writers. In Tyndall's view, the twentieth century was an historical 'aberration', while the nineteenth had kept the patterns of cultural change 'within the parameters of the European cultural tradition', which in its turn was accepted, Tyndall argued, 'without question as the highest to which man could aspire'. Cultural decline ensued in the twentieth century, but Tyndall believed that the Modernist and progressive cultural 'con-trick' of that century was now in the process of 'being massively rejected' via a cultural 'counter-revolution'. It was not a matter of putting the clock back: 'on the contrary, the rhythm of the clock' was now 'simply being restored' as the twenty-first century approached. In a 'Return to Culture', the new century would, in Tyndall's estimation, 'rediscover what is true art, true music and true literature, just as it will return to sanity in other related cultural fields'.

As with Mosley and the UM, Tyndall sought to stress how his movement was a 'modernising' movement. Political modernisation was often conflated with cultural 'modernisation'. In a use of language designed to claw back the 'modern' mantle for the BNP from liberalism and its 'Modernist' aesthetic representations, Tyndall argued in 1990: 'The 'progressives' will become reactionaries and the 'reactionaries' progressives'. He concluded: 'Our civilisation is awakening from a nightmare, and is ready to resume history's road!'.

This cultural reading of British history, and notably dogmatic assertion that the BNP

could expurgate and cleanse contemporary culture, restoring the ‘High’ culture of the past, led to BNP articles on music, literature, art, and architecture. Wagner, Elgar, Tolkien, Dickens, and – in particular – Henry Williamson were all variously pointed to as representatives of the White race and ‘quality’ cultural production in the past. Tyndall asserted: ‘Everything possible should be done to preserve and nurture the national heritage in music, art, the theatre, literature, and all other creative fields’. Essentially, however, an unbreakable connection to the British ‘Race’ was required in all cultural activity. Especially desirable, in Tyndall’s view, were films which promoted ‘outstanding creative works by members of the British Race’.

Employing Mosleyite discourse on national rebirth, Tyndall argued that the ‘recovery’ of the ‘national character’ involved a ‘mission of total regeneration of a people – in mind, body and spirit – as a necessary prerequisite of political recovery’. This entailed the avoidance of ‘reading degenerate books and listening to degenerate music’.

Again, in 1992, Tyndall attacked what he called ‘the debasement of culture, manifest in the elevation of ugliness and depravity in every conceivable artistic form’. In images notably similar to both the UM and NF’s highly romanticised and mythical views of the values and cultural representations of Ancient Greece, the BNP habitually attacked ‘Modernist’ architecture and pointed to the ‘beauty’ of Ancient Greek cultural achievement.

Interestingly, Tyndall – as with Morrison, the NF writer I referred to earlier – appeared to be especially preoccupied in his BNP years with the ‘musical’ aspects of representations of culture. In 1988, for example, he penned a detailed article for Spearhead in which he set out his views on the ‘Music of Revolution’ and his preferred type of music for the BNP’s ‘Counter-Revolution’, which included

Schubert, Beethoven, and Mozart.

He complained that, some years previously, the 'nationalist movement' in Britain had tried to use 'pop' and rock music to reach out to large numbers of rebellious teenagers and imbue them with nationalist ideas, but this had led to the movement compromising its principles, a political 'own-goal', and something he had originally warned about. He pointed to what he called 'the cesspit of jungle noise' behind the phenomenon of 'rock', which was a form of culture 'that our culture-distorters can easily control'.

Tyndall then proceeded to set out what constituted, in his view, the way to wean young people away from this: 'By being encouraged to hear the best of white music, both classical and popular, such people can be induced quickly to recognise the jungle rhythms of today's 'pop' industry for the garbage that they are'. He asserted that, at all party events, the BNP 'should reject all forms of alien noise and have played only the music that belongs to our own heritage'. Setting out a vision of how the BNP should approach music and other forms of culture more generally, Tyndall then proclaimed: 'What is desirable is that the whole of the music industry, as well as the rest of our world of arts and popular entertainment, are taken from the almost monopolistic control of the people presently dominating those fields and placed firmly in the hands of those whose purpose is to cleanse our national life'.

The purification of national culture was thus always of paramount importance to the BNP leader and his lieutenants, particularly in the face of the threat from 'Globalisation'. Above all, in common with the UM and NF, the BNP sought the 'renewal of our civilisation' and was out, as Tyndall put it in The Eleventh Hour, to 'prove Spengler wrong in his assertion that the West is finished'.

Conclusion: A continuous far right cultural crusade?

In conclusion, I would argue that there are notable similarities between interwar fascists and *post*-War neo-fascists in their ideas on ‘culture’. Interwar fascists in Britain adamantly asserted that culture must be ‘disciplined’, becoming an instrument of the state or race. Fascist theorists, such as those in the BUF, therefore defined what was acceptable and unacceptable, legitimate and illegitimate in terms of cultural and aesthetic creativity.

The ideas of British *neo*-fascists towards cultural production showed very similar patterns. Significantly, John Tyndall’s reference in 1981 to a ‘cultural revolution’ was indicative of a core theme in post-1945 British far right intellectual publications more generally. All the three movements discussed in this paper, while sometimes differing over the precise details concerning the best way to bring this about, broadly held in common the desire to *purify* national, racial or European culture, interpreting this in terms of a social and political revolution.

As with inter-war British fascism, all three movements saw the impetus behind their ‘project’ as lying in their critique of liberal, democratic and Enlightenment Western values. Neo-fascists were united in their determination to radically ‘cleanse’ the diseased cultural symptoms of contemporary liberalism, ‘save’ the nation, and restore cultural identities which they viewed as traditional, healthy, ‘real’ and qualitatively superior.

Herein lies the key to the neo-fascist approach to culture and the struggle against ‘decadence’: it was and is to be a restorative revolution, continuous and all-embracing, reviving selected cultural representations from the past and reinserting them into the present. In this sense, neo-fascists wanted to reclaim society from the ‘alien’ values of liberalism and Enlightenment Modernism and to prove Spengler was

mistaken in his cultural pessimism. They envisaged 'real' culture as representing solidity over abstraction, beauty over ugliness, and 'national' identity in preference to 'international' otherness.

Author's note: Much of the above paper will form the basis of a chapter I am contributing to a new edited collection on the *Culture of Fascism*.